

# COMMUNICATION AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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## PROCEEDINGS OF THE GLOBAL E-CONFERENCE AND SUMMER SPEAKER SERIES ON THE ROLE OF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNICATION IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

May 29 - June 9, 2006



World Bank Development Communication Division – SDO;  
USAID Development Communication & Sustainable Tourism Unit;  
United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

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Hosted on [www.devcomm-congress.org](http://www.devcomm-congress.org)

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The e-conference was made possible through a partnership between the World Bank Development Communication Division, the USAID Development Communication & Sustainable Tourism Unit and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). It also benefited from collaboration with SNV - Netherlands Development Organization, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), all of which contributed to specific sessions. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank, USAID, UNWTO nor those of the other partner institutions. Furthermore, statements by participants do not always reflect the view of the organizations to which they belong. The authors are grateful to all participants who made contributions to the e-conference, and are particularly appreciative of the excellent work done by the moderators of the five sessions, namely Judith Voermans and Toot Oostveen (SNV) for Session

2, Susy Karammel (GTZ), Giulia Carbone (IUCN) and Alice Crabtree (TIES) for Session 3, Chris Seek (Solimar International) and Metilde Wendenbaum (ECEAT) for Session 4, and Daniel Mattson (Heritage Design) for Session 5.

Finally, we would like to thank Natasha Scripture (World Bank) and Carol Hansen (USAID/NRIC) for editing and production; Daniele Calabrese, Riccardo Torrado and Eliana Esposito (World Bank) for the support with the web posting on the website and Mr. Claudio Piazzi (freelance consultant) for assembly of this document.

For further information on the Communication for Sustainable Tourism activities of the three main partners, please visit:

[www.worldbank.org/developmentcommunications](http://www.worldbank.org/developmentcommunications)

[www.nric.net/tourism.htm](http://www.nric.net/tourism.htm)

[www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame\\_sustainable.html](http://www.world-tourism.org/frameset/frame_sustainable.html)







# INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors<sup>1</sup> and one that continues to expand very rapidly<sup>2</sup>. Done well, tourism development can be a powerful tool for economic growth, poverty reduction<sup>3</sup>, and for the conservation of natural and cultural resources. While tourism represents an important development opportunity for many countries and communities, it can also have very negative impacts, such as disrupting social structures, harming the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, and threatening natural and cultural heritage. Wise planning and management of tourism development is key to keeping it a force for good.

Tourism is truly cross-sectoral, involving a wide range of issues that can include the following:

- trade and investment policy
- employment and labor laws
- enterprise development
- public-private partnerships
- community and urban planning (land use planning, transportation, etc.)
- infrastructure development
- conservation of cultural heritage, protected areas and biodiversity
- management of natural resources (water, energy, waste)
- safety and security
- education and workforce development.

There are vast numbers of stakeholders, with their different and sometimes opposing interests and agendas. The



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multiple stakeholders at both national and local levels must be able to access the information they need to understand their long-term interests, articulate their opinions, identify proposals, and network effectively with one another. Tourism development choices must balance between national and local needs, public and private sector, host communities, civil society, tourists, and mass media. Political choices, in particular, must reconcile immediate returns and longer-term benefits, which requires a clear and well-defined vision. Sustainable tourism development thus represents a very complex task.

Communication has a huge role in supporting sustainable tourism development and managing its multiple dimensions. Communication can create and facilitate a system that allows stakeholders to exchange opinions and arrive

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1 The 2006 Travel and Tourism Economic Research of the World Travel & Tourism Council and Accenture states that in 2006 the world travel and tourism industry is expected to contribute 3.6% (US\$ 1,754.5 bn) to the world Gross Domestic Product. The T&T Economy contribution should rise to 10.3 %.

2 Travel and Tourism activity is expected to grow by 4.2% per annum in real terms between 2007 and 2016. 2006 Travel and Tourism Economic Research of the World Travel & Tourism Council and Accenture.

3 World Travel and Tourism Economy employment is estimated at 234,305,000 jobs in 2006, 8.7% of total employment. 2006 Travel and Tourism Economic Research of the World Travel & Tourism Council and Accenture.



at consensual solutions. Effective use of communication tools can also link products to markets, and can contribute to visitors' safe and positive experiences.

In a sustainable tourism development scenario, the various stakeholders have not only the right to participate in the decision-making process, but have also the responsibility to adopt environmentally, socially and economically sustainable behaviors and practices. Communication processes can build awareness of this responsibility and persuade stakeholders that sustainable practices ultimately benefit their long-term interests.

A comprehensive communication strategy, which should identify how information, awareness creation, advocacy, network building, conflict mitigation, and communication platforms will be supported, is essential for any successful sustainable tourism development activity.

An e-conference addressing the role of communication in sustainable tourism development took place between May 29 and June 9, 2006. The World Bank, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) envisioned the forum as a means to bring together development practitioners, tourism professionals, decision-makers, academicians and communication specialists representing various national institutions, private sector and media organizations, NGOs, international institutions, and donors active in the field of communication and sustainable tourism to discuss the role that communication can play in designing and implementing sustainable

tourism strategies and projects at national and local levels; to share experiences, information and perspectives; to identify and share lessons learned and best practices; and to consolidate knowledge on development communication in sustainable tourism programs.

Discussions focused on the following topics:

- The role that communication can play in designing and implementing sustainable tourism strategies and projects at national and local levels;
- The importance of sharing experiences, information and perspectives;
- Identification of lessons learned and most effective practices; and
- The exchange of knowledge on development communication in sustainable tourism programs.

The e-conference was part of the preparation for the World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD) and was hosted on [www.devcomm-congress.org](http://www.devcomm-congress.org). It consisted of the following five concurrent sessions, moderated by the persons listed below.

The e-conference benefited from the active contribution of more than 700 registered participants from all six continents.

A seminar series in was held in Washington, DC, during the summer of 2006 as a follow-on to the e-conference in order to further explore ideas raised in the five sessions. Material from those presentations has been woven into the session summaries that follow.

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Session 1	<i>The Role of Communication in Planning and Implementing Sustainable Tourism Policies and Strategies</i>	Gabor Vereczi (UNWTO), Iain Christie and Gianmarco Scuppa (WB)
Session 2	<i>Communication for Community Involvement in Sustainable Tourism Development</i>	Judith Voermans and Toot Oostveen (SNV)
Session 3	<i>The Role of Communication in Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility in Sustainable Tourism Development</i>	Christina Cavaliere, Alice Crabtree, Amos Bien and Martha Honey (TIES), Susy Karammel (GTZ), Giulia Carbone (IUCN)
Session 4	<i>The Role of Communication in Linking Sustainable Tourism Products to Markets</i>	Chris Seek (Solimar International), Robin Goldberg (Lonely Planet) and Metilde Wendenbaum (ECEAT)
Session 5	<i>Interpreting Tourism Destinations and Orienting Visitors</i>	Daniel Mattson (Heritage Design), Jonathan Tourtellot and James Dion (National Geographic), Graham Brooks (ICOMOS)



## Session I:

# THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

The Tourism Policies and Strategies session of the e-conference focused on finding answers and providing examples for the following questions:

- How can one make the best use of conventional communication and consultation techniques (such as forums, meetings, workshops)?
- How can one harness modern technology for effective participatory processes in tourism policies and plans?
- How can conventional and modern techniques be best combined for innovative and effective communication?
- How can the media support tourism policy and planning processes for public information?
- What are the most effective ways of communication to inform stakeholders and the general public?

### COMMUNICATION TO INVOLVE STAKEHOLDERS IN DECISION-MAKING

The fact that the tourism sector is multisectoral, and can be very fragmented, was a recurring theme in the discussions. The wide range of stakeholders at both local and national levels having a role in the formulation and implementation of sustainable tourism policies and strategies includes:

- Public authorities in the fields of economy, environment, tourism, transportation, education, culture, etc. (ministries and state departments, their regional and local offices, regional and municipal authorities, etc.);
- Tourism businesses and their associations at the national and local levels (accommodation and catering, tour operators, guides and other service providers);
- Local communities;
- NGOs and civil society groups;
- Academic and research institutions; and
- Media organizations.



Participants agreed that policy and strategy development must be a process where all stakeholders are able to freely express their viewpoints and have their interests taken into account. National and local policies must be coordinated, consensual and responsive to the needs of different stakeholders. Governments have a key role in policy-making and implementation processes, and in this role they must strive to ensure the informed participation of other sectors through consultative processes. Undertaking ample consultations is key to the successful formulation and implementation of tourism policies. In addition, the many different interest groups often hold disparate viewpoints that must be coalesced into a common vision.

## MULTI-LEVEL STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT IS NEEDED

LOCAL / NATIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Public authorities	International / regional organizations
Media Organizations	Donors
Tourism businesses and their associations	
NGOs and civil society groups	
Academic and research institutions	

Participants stressed that effective communication is therefore essential for policy-making and implementation. They agreed that both conventional communication methods (e.g., forums, meetings and workshops) and the application of new technologies (e.g., telecommunication, Internet, emails, data bases) are key to developing sustainable tourism policies. The need for governments to create and maintain websites with regularly updated information was stressed, as was the notion that websites should not serve just for tourism promotion purposes, but also to disseminate information on tourism policies and plans. Particular attention to the need for effective communication from the central to the regional and local levels was also emphasized, given that in developing countries the remoteness of some areas and the lack of telecommunication networks hinder both horizontal and vertical communication.

### USE OF PUBLIC EVENTS TO PROMOTE TOURISM IN TANZANIA

Development and institutional processes leading to the design of national and local level tourism policies can benefit from public events supported by political leaders, national and international media, and regional and international organizations. An example was provided from Tanzania, where MIGA, an agency of the World Bank, promoted a tourism investment conference with the Ministry of Tourism. President Mkapa made the opening speech, and also met with individual investors. The Africa Travel Association (ATA) was instrumental in securing interviews on the conference with BBC, which were broadcast live, and ATA published several articles in their magazine. The local newspapers provided event coverage. The event had some very direct and concrete results: investment agreements were signed and are now being implemented. The Tanzania example also demonstrated the importance and effectiveness of good post-event follow-up: potential investors were kept informed of progress by e-mail, and the government has attended hotel investment forums to generate greater interest in the country.



BCEG PROJECT / AND

### TOP-DOWN AND BOTTOM-UP COMMUNICATION

An interesting example of communication among the stakeholder groups at the national, regional and local levels was provided by **Kamelia Georgieva**, Ecotourism Program Coordinator for the USAID BCEG project, responsible for developing a National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan for Bulgaria. The project employed a mix of traditional and innovative communication tools and activities, such as workshops, forums, conferences, publications, posters, and the Internet. National experts and institutions interacted in focus group meetings and local workshops, and public forums were held for consultation. Extensive media coverage helped the different activities to inform the wider public. Several types of publications were employed, including booklets with the outline of the strategy document, and leaflets and posters to inform local stakeholders about the specifics of ecotourism and upcoming public meetings. Two national forums were held with the participation of major international partners - the first set the stage and outlined the strategy, and the second approved the strategy and action plan and shared it with the nation and international partners.

*For more about this project, see:*

[http://www.nric.net/tourism/Bulgaria\\_project.htm](http://www.nric.net/tourism/Bulgaria_project.htm)

### SUCCESS OF ZAMBIA TOURISM NEWSLETTER

In addition to international and national institutions, smaller organizations and individual initiatives can also disseminate information and promote cooperation to encourage sustainable tourism practices. In an example supplied about Zambia, a tourism newsletter started by a committed individual gradually became an important source of tour-

ism development information with the support of public and private sector organizations. Other e-conference participants pointed out that multiple international development and donor organizations often carry out overlapping policy-development and institutional strengthening activities in the same country or area and that improved communication is essential in order to coordinate donor activities, minimize duplication and maximize synergies.

## THE INTERNET AS A TOOL FOR CONSULTATION AND INFORMATION TRANSFER

With growing numbers of users and improving access worldwide, the Internet is an increasingly important tool for stakeholder consultation and information transfer. In Australia, the Tourism White Paper Implementation Plan 2004 was launched by the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, and refined through on-line consultation with key tourism industry stakeholders, Australian Government departments and state and territory government. A large volume of stakeholder input was received and incorporated into the planning process. The list of organizations that participated in the consultation and their input was made public on the website of the Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources, together with an advanced strategy draft that incorporated the different views.

The Internet is also a key tool for information-sharing and exchange of experiences on tourism policies. DestiNet, a new initiative of the European Environment Agency was cited as a good example. (<http://destinet.ewindows.eu.org>). The information resource and communications platform contains selected, quality assessed information on the ways in which tourism is being made more sustainable. DestiNet offers a number of services including the option to post news bulletins and suggest new links on relevant topics. It acts as a single European-level gateway to environmental sustainability for the tourism sector, allowing users to:

- Understand and report on sector impacts on the environment;
- Learn how to improve tourism sector sustainability; and
- Coordinate information exchange between tourism stakeholders.

## ADVOCACY

Many developing countries are looking to tourism development to solve their economic problems. For many of



*Helpful  
Internet  
resources*

TIES Travel Choice Directory: [www.ecotourism.org](http://www.ecotourism.org)  
 Rainforest Alliance-Sustainable Travel: [www.eco-index.org/tourism](http://www.eco-index.org/tourism)  
 Certification Network of the Americas: [www.certificationnetwork.org](http://www.certificationnetwork.org)  
 Best Green Hotels: [www.bestgreenhotels.com](http://www.bestgreenhotels.com)  
 Conservation International: [www.ecotour.org](http://www.ecotour.org)  
 Ecoclub.com: [www.ecoclub.com](http://www.ecoclub.com)  
 EcoTour Directory: [www.ecotourdirectory.com](http://www.ecotourdirectory.com)  
 Ecotrans: [www.eco-tip.org](http://www.eco-tip.org)  
 Ecotravel.com: [www.ecotravel.com](http://www.ecotravel.com)  
 Green Hotels Association: [www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com)  
 Green Stop: [www.greenstop.net](http://www.greenstop.net)  
 Mesoamerican Ecotourism Alliance: [www.travelwithmea.com](http://www.travelwithmea.com)  
 Planeta: [www.planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com)  
 Responsible Travel.com: [www.responsibletravel.com](http://www.responsibletravel.com)  
 Sustainable Travel International: [www.sustainabletravelinternational.org](http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org)  
 The Travel Foundation: [www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk](http://www.thetravelfoundation.org.uk)  
 Tourism Concern: [www.tourismconcern.org.uk](http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk)  
 VISIT: [www.yourvisit.info](http://www.yourvisit.info)  
 Worldsurface.com: [www.worldsurface.com](http://www.worldsurface.com)



them, their natural and cultural heritage represents one of their few economic resources. Natural and cultural heritage are, however, not renewable and tourism must be addressed in a sustainable way to prevent irreversible degradation to the resources that draw tourists to a country. Unfortunately, developing countries frequently experience some difficulty in planning and promoting sustainable tourism policies. Politicians are often guided by the necessity to achieve rapid and visible results during their tenure. Choices about tourism development policies and strategies are too often dictated by the necessity to satisfy immediate needs: sustaining balance of payments, creating new jobs to reduce unemployment, etc. However, tourism development projects producing immediate benefits (revenue generation and job creation as examples) may turn out to be negative in the long term if they threaten natural and cultural heritage. Civil society and mass media organizations can assume the role of



**Ivan Guarderas Flores** proposed developing a database for tourists and local actors where they could register alerts or complaints about bad practices in tourism development (social, environmental and commercial). This could generate positive pressure to the local authorities, but would have to be carefully verified.

watchdogs to ensure that tourism policies and strategies are beneficial both for local communities and for the conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.

An extended dialogue developed under the discussion topic “Advocacy for sustainable tourism policies,” focusing on the role of education and awareness-raising activities. Various messages stressed the need to integrate sustainable tourism policy issues in school curricula in different types of education programs related to tourism management and planning, including vocational and technical schools as well as universities. It was also suggested that sustainability issues need to be incorporated into a general education curriculum in order to ensure that future generations of tourists are sensitive to environmental and social concerns when engaging in touristic activities.

It was subsequently noted that, while education in schools and academic institution is critical, awareness-raising activities about sustainable policy issues should also target public officials and business persons. Suggested communication tools for awareness-raising among stakeholders include seminars and workshops, internships/mentor relationships with leaders of successful programs in other communities, and Web forums to share lessons learned from other experiences.

NGOs can have a key role in awareness-raising activities targeting public authorities. In Bulgaria, the Foundation for Local Government Reform, an NGO specializing in supporting local governments, used specific tools such as newsletters, workshops, training, and grant schemes to



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educate mayors and their administrations and the municipal councils about the benefits of sustainable tourism. The same foundation helped to facilitate the local process during development of the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan.

## TRAINING AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Some participants stressed “tourism knowledge management” as a key factor to be considered in all countries, suggesting that universities and schools of tourism and professional studies should be involved in collective actions. A lack of specific academic and training resources is at the root of many problems with unsustainable tourism development.

Ron Mader, editor of the sustainable tourism website [www.planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com), pointed out that many tourism training courses are offered around the world. Tourism portals, however, fail to provide regularly updated calendars of events with descriptions of courses and instructors. Also, participants should be able to rate their instructors and some sort of public evaluation should occur after six to twelve months.



## Session 2:

# COMMUNICATION AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

## COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

One of the key principles of sustainable tourism is that the local population is placed at the center of tourism development interventions in terms of participation in the decision-making process and benefit sharing. It is at the community level where tourism impacts are mostly keenly felt, conservation challenges must be met and culture is most affected. Residents living in historic centers, near archaeological sites or close to natural protected areas can play a key role in the conservation of those resources if they can derive benefit from them. Several e-conference participants therefore stressed the importance of community involvement and active participation in sustainable tourism development as one key to success.

Among the principal challenges that participants mentioned related to community involvement:

- Frequent changes in local government (both policies and personnel)
- Lack of government support
- Conflicting interests between groups (between government and religious groups, and between communities and big hotel owners or oil companies, for example)
- Lack of funds
- Late attempts to involve local communities
- Lack of commercial skills at the local level
- Too many different actors (NGOs, donor agencies, government, etc.) often engaged in well-intentioned but under-funded projects that are not coordinated with other efforts
- Failure to consider the whole tourism system of a country or region and not taking into account demand for tourism products



- Communication gap between communities and the private sector.

Communication tools mentioned as effective ways to involve local communities in tourism development included training; participatory workshops; community, group and individual meetings; local radio; school newsletters; and local events. Community leaders are an important communication channel.

Another issue that frequently surfaced in discussion was the need to consider tourism as a business, and community members as businesspeople. Community-based tourism projects should therefore be focused on market demand. This implies a need for professionalism in the tasks required to start a business such as: a business feasibility study, business administration, hospitality, marketing strategy, development of IT marketing tools, market analysis, etc.

## COMMUNICATION KEY TO SUCCESS IN KENYA

**Roselyne Okech**, of the Maseno University in Kenya, posted an abstract on the role of communication in a ecotourism project in Kenya with the following conclusion: "Involving communities in the implementation and management of a tourism development project necessitates close supervision of the activities, capacity building at the local level and a strong commitment from the communities. The involvement of communities will depend very much on the nature of the activities and the level of communication. Community development has certainly undergone an evolution and is still at the heart of the latter-day paradigm shift towards a human orientation... The concern today lies in matters such as whether the poorest are reached, whether the approach is still top-down, whether the people have decision-making power over the use of resources, whether human values are met, and whether development is environment friendly. Kenya is slowly following the same path and so there are still problems to be solved with regard to the management aspect. Communication is key in all these aspects."

Communities generally need support to carry out successful tourism development initiatives. Technical experts however, must simply provide expertise, experience and advice, and act as facilitators to help local communities make informed decisions and build their own strategy. This means supporting consultative processes within a community to allow the different segments of the population (women, for example) to express their opinions. *Toot Oostveen*, of SNV ([www.snv-la.org](http://www.snv-la.org)) stated that consultants should first identify the kind of consultancy and support the community wants to receive. Signing a contract between the community and the consulting organization can be one way to enhance the sense of ownership within a community.

Community workshops are an important way to identify problems and concerns, and to determine available options before decisions are made and actions taken. Workshops can also be used to introduce communities to new topics such as marketing techniques, or to design project proposals which will be used to seek out funding. The Internet was often mentioned as an important tool to put local tourism micro-enterprises into direct contact with the global market of travelers.

Some participants stressed that it is essential to gain the trust of local communities prior to any productive interaction with them. Others pointed out the need to avoid making communities dependent on development workers. Capacity-building, ownership and empowerment are important to the community management and long-term sustainability of tourism enterprises.

Finally, participants stressed the obvious, but often neglected, necessity for consultants and other outside entities to consider culture, beliefs and traditions in tourism planning, and to avoid preconceptions while listening and facilitating participatory processes.

## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNITIES AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Many participants described a communication gap between the private sector (especially outside investors) and local communities, feeling that the private sector is not prepared to communicate with communities because it requires more time and patience than most business people are willing to invest. They identified a contradiction between fast business processes and slow community processes. These different perceptions, different assumptions and different priorities, as well as mistrust and a lack of

## GOVERNMENT-INDIGENOUS PEOPLES PARTNERSHIP

Two case studies in Canada (The Quu'as West Coast Trail Society and Haida Gwaii, Queen Charlotte Islands) were posted by **Mike Robbins**, marketing consultant from Canada specializing in tourism, to describe a successful partnership between government and indigenous communities in sensitive natural areas and national parks, which provided economic opportunities for local communities in balance with nature protection. Out of these studies, it appears that successful partnerships have the following qualities:

- Equal voice for partners
- Respect and understanding of cultural differences (i.e. timeframes, language, traditional knowledge, etc.)
- Sound business relationship
- Available financial resources for activities aimed at involving indigenous people
- Employment opportunities as well as business development opportunities
- Enhancement of local knowledge and capacity building
- Respect for sacred sites

willingness to collaborate, can generate misunderstandings between the private sector and local communities. Another issue raised in the e-conference was that communities are often not considered (and don't consider themselves) to be a component of the private sector. However, the moment they enter into the tourism business they become part of the private sector and need to adopt a business-related point of view. This was the experience of William Tuffin, who is working to develop community eco-tourism in Laos.

Methods of overcoming barriers mentioned by e-conference participants included awareness-raising activities and dialogue between businessmen and communities to aid in understanding different points of views, opinions and interests. Time, trust, transparency, and creative thinking are essential for identifying common ground, common interests and potential shared benefits. As one of the e-conference participants remarked, *“Who should be responsible for supporting the local communities in undertaking a profitable tourism business? It is a question to consider in each situation.”*

## INVESTMENT AND MARKETING

If government or public donors are not supporting a community tourism initiative, communities need to find creative ways to access financing. Sponsorship might be one option for community tourism. An example was given of the BC Aboriginal Tourism Association in which sponsors have their corporate name affiliated with the Association and see value in the exposure they receive from financing specific activities. Mike Robbins presented another example in the financing of a cultural ecolodge, where an association received funds from the British and Canadian Air Force, a mining company and a private foundation.

In the case of Great Bear Rainforest in British Columbia, combining large scale nature conservation within First Nation traditional territory has been key to forging a

**Valere Tjolle** (<http://www.totemtourismmarketing.org>) launched the idea of job swapping, an exchange program in which community members work in commercial tour companies and vice versa. This allows the community to understand the mechanisms of the tourism business and trains community members in planning and managing tourism businesses. On the other side, the experience helps commercial tour company staff to better understand the local reality they are dealing with.

**Ron Mader** described the [www.planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com) policy of working with communities over time. In Oaxaca, Mexico, listening to locals led to innovations such as the Oaxaca Options roundtable discussions, a series of informal presentations and dialogues. One example that improves community benefits is “Walk the Weavers” in the nearby craft-making town of Teotitlan del Valle, in which the town's community museum organizes tours. Visitors are led to workshops by weavers with the goal of increasing direct sales, benefiting travelers with lower prices and weavers with higher income. <http://tinyurl.com/mmotd>

**Trip Sweeney** posted information about a new initiative, STEP Up Travel (<http://www.stepuptravel.org>). This is a web-based concept that provides a tool for local people to create their own online tourism microenterprise for direct interaction with travelers. The concept has been implemented into a completely functional, global tool to provide ownership to local people in travel/tourism and provide access to global markets of travelers. The site has been translated into Spanish [www.laredsocial.org](http://www.laredsocial.org) and Portuguese [www.aredede.org](http://www.aredede.org).

link between private sector funds and communities. One element of these historic land use agreements has been the creation of the “Coast Opportunities Funds,” a conservation-financing program developed through a remarkable collaborative process involving First Nations, environmentalists, philanthropists, and government representatives. Establishing this program required a decade of negotiation, again highlighting the length of time some processes need.

One of the biggest issues facing all community tourism projects in remote locations is marketing – creating awareness and stimulating interest in widely dispersed geographic market areas. In May 2006, the Lonely Planet travel publishers produced “Code Green – Experiences of a Lifetime”. The book focuses on unique experiences with an emphasis on minimizing environmental and social impact and maximizing connections with local people. Publications like this should help with encouraging travelers to dig further into less publicized tourism opportunities.

One example of a private/public sustainable tourism partnership is now underway in Clarendon Parish, Jamaica. “Clarendon Express” is a partnership between a wide variety of stakeholders from the private sector, the Jamaican government, environmental NGOs, a pro-

## **PARTNERSHIPS: COMMUNITIES/PRIVATE SECTOR**

**Samar Hammad**, from the craft sector in Jordan, gave an example of a private organization trying to build a partnership with a community in the handicraft business. The group faced a lot of mistrust and realized that a long process was needed to build personal relations before collaborating with the community. Slowly, some individuals began to show trust, and others followed later. The success and related benefits of some individual craftsmen helped to encourage the others.

**Paula Eshoo** mentioned that there are several interesting community-based initiatives in Laos, where a number of development partners and the private sector have joined to assist the country in implementing its National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan. For more information, see [www.ecotourismlaos.com](http://www.ecotourismlaos.com).

**Maria José Zapata Campos**, from the University of Castilla La Mancha, Spain, mentioned how the failure or success of community/private business partnerships depends upon perceptions and the quality of interpersonal relationships and, consequently, upon communication issues. She also mentioned the importance of understanding how power is distributed between the different interest groups, individuals, institutions, and community groups involved. The control, access and distribution of information, tacit decisions, the absence or presence of certain themes in the partnership's agenda are key issues for a successful partnership.

tected area, local hotels, the Chamber of Commerce, and others. Jamalco is collaborating with national and international partners to convert an industrial train route into a tourism train that links the sea to the mountains with diverse visitor opportunities along the way. Communication activities to encourage involvement and collaboration between stakeholders were important to the success of this initiative.

## **FALSE EXPECTATIONS**

It is necessary for local communities to realize that sustainable tourism development is not a panacea, and that hard work is required to receive any benefit. The community must approach tourism as any other business that involves risks. They need sufficient information and

capacity to assess and mitigate these risks. They also need to realize that they are service providers who are in a long chain of interdependent tourism-related businesses and they need to be familiar with the other actors.

Unrealistic expectations can be reduced through frequent and detailed communication amongst all stakeholders. Capacity-building training and equity in tourism benefits can also build the trust of communities and reduce false expectations.



## **INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR OF TOURISTS**

Many e-conference participants felt that the best way to inform tourists about appropriate behaviour in host countries is to reach them prior to travel via guidebooks. Many books already incorporate a chapter on responsible travel. Other channels that are important vehicles for carrying information to a wide range of tourists (for instance those traveling in organized tours) include travel agencies, Internet sites and magazines. However, travel magazines and travel narration too often present destinations just as tourism products, forgetting that people with other cultures and sensibilities live there. Some e-conference participants stressed the need to analyze visitors' perceptions of destinations to identify potential problems and recommend awareness activities for addressing inappropriate behavior, minimizing tourism impacts on the local culture and enhancing relations with local communities.

In Laos, the following activities and communication tools helped tourists adopt appropriate behaviors: "do and don't" booklets, tour orientation pamphlets, training courses for local guides, and signs and posters in villages. For more information, see [www.ecotourismlaos.com](http://www.ecotourismlaos.com).



### Session 3:

# THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN PROMOTING CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The notion of CSR is not new, but its adoption and integration into the tourism industry is in very early stages, voluntary and largely spearheaded by the ecotourism movement. However, the adoption and endorsement of the basic principles of sustainable tourism that address the new paradigm of triple bottom line assessment has steadily grown over the last decade – although it is undeniable that the major focus has been on environmental protection and conservation rather than addressing social issues such as labor standards. This theme is also present in many of the voluntary sustainable tourism certification programs – many of which are considered valuable instruments to encourage and facilitate CSR.

The thrust of CSR in the mainstream (mass) tourism industry is accused of being largely environmental, the skeptics say, simply because environmental management systems help reduce costs (through minimization of potable water and energy use, and reduction of waste) or are perceived as a potential selling point (green sells). Philanthropy by major tourism players also is another element of CSR that has been adopted to varying degrees, becoming more accepted and even expected, although largely as ad hoc gestures of goodwill.

However, CSR in the tourism industry is not simply about potential environmental savings, certification programs or philanthropy – it is increasingly being considered by enlightened corporations and individuals as the only way to ensure long term sustainability, and often leads to better businesses with increased profitability. There are many in the business community who see CSR not as a “luxury”



USFS / J. BAUER

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is the commitment of businesses to contribute to sustainable economic development – working with employees, their families, the local community and society at large to improve the quality of life – in ways that are both good for business and good for development.**

**THE WORLD BANK'S WORKING DEFINITION OF CSR**

that is indulged in when and where resources allow – but as a fundamental tool to doing business well, and hence one that needs to be built into strategies to ensure risk management and reputational enhancement.

The e-conference participants' contributions certainly clarified the need for increased communication about and for CSR in tourism. Communication has to take place at all levels between and amongst the different stakeholders. A regulatory framework is needed not only to facilitate “seamless” communication but also to create common grounds and a common understanding of some of the sustainability issues and the potential of CSR to enhance business viability and longevity. The case for adopting CSR in tourism needs to be better communicated in language appropriate to the various stakeholders. Communication was considered essential to:

- help tourism businesses and consumers (tourists) understand and adopt relevant environmental and social sustainability standards and systems (certification, guidelines, environmental management systems, fair trade, community relations and outreach, etc.);
- help tourism businesses that are adopting appropriate CSR principles and relevant standards in being rewarded by increased business; and
- create better links among large tourism operators, local communities, and small and medium enterprises to develop win-win partnerships.

### **LACK OF AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED DEFINITION OF CSR**

A large part of the e-conference discussion concentrated on different perceptions and definitions of sustainable tourism and corporate social responsibility. Despite a multitude of definitions by several international and national institutions, tourism enterprises, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals, there is no coherent and internationally recognized definition framework according to which CSR activities can be structured or scrutinized. The lack of an internationally recognized definition of CSR leads to a range of obstacles for communication on CSR between stakeholders. Many companies misunderstand sustainable management or CSR as simply “philanthropy”, “charitable giving”, or “humanitarian aid,” etc., rather than using sustainable management to improve their local business context (e.g. community relations and outreach projects, environmental management, good social standards for employees, local purchasing options, etc.).

On the other hand, there were also a number of participants who argued against one univocal standard or definitive “definition” for CSR. Given the diversity of cultures, differently sized operations (mass vs. small and medium enterprises [SMEs]), and the multitude of business types (e.g. accommodation, flight, tour operation, etc.) in the tourism sector, using one set of standards, may, according to the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), be limiting and might prove to be inadequate.

### **STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION**

Participants highlighted that, to their knowledge, there isn't one preferred, or leading organization that is necessarily the only or even the most successful model to communicate about and help with mainstreaming CSR principles and practices. Instead, they believe that there is a need to facilitate more widespread and transparent communication on CSR at all levels. Therefore all possible stakeholders need to be identified and held to account for spreading the principles of sustainable development. Aside from the industry, consumers and NGOs, these include:

- Certification and standards-setting organizations
- Governmental organizations
- Intermediaries.

The government was most often identified by the participants as the stakeholder responsible for creating the appropriate framework environment to encourage and ensure successful and transparent communication on CSR.

Appreciating the current structures of the tourism business and its sales structure, two additional stakeholders were identified as important intermediaries and ambassadors for sustainable development and CSR:

- Sales staff (e.g. travel agents, sales & marketing, inbound operators)
- Media.

A study on marketing certified products recently completed by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) concluded that “green” tourism certification programs can get the “biggest bang for the buck” by marketing to intermediaries such as tour operators, guide books and the media, rather than directly to consumers. These intermediaries can, in turn, market directly to consumers. With time, as certification programs grow in size and spread to more countries (i.e., a critical mass develops), and as more tour operators use and promote certified products, consumer



awareness and demand is likely to grow. While critics of certification often cite the current lack of consumer demand as a reason why it will not work, TIES would argue that, based on lessons learned from other industries, consumer demand takes a long time to grow and is best built through certification programs targeting and convincing intermediaries such as tour operators/wholesalers.

The e-conference highlighted that, in many cases, individuals who have credibility both from the personal and professional point of view might become successful communicators on CSR, and could recruit high profile “mentors” that support and encourage others to become proponents of CSR. The identification of charismatic leaders who would be able to win the minds of small entrepreneurs was suggested as a possible strategy. A potential threat would be that communication would be then limited to individually perceived and defined issues rather than incorporating the real needs of all stakeholders.

## CERTIFICATION AND STANDARDS

Certification and standards were identified by the participants as the current most effective option for actively supporting and guiding CSR processes on the individual company level. In the (self-proclaimed) sustainable tourism industry, the development of standards and voluntary certification that provide some form of “guarantee” of sustainability standards is common, but widespread adoption and use of these standards is unfortunately still rare. Consumer surveys are confusing, for although they often proclaim a general willingness to pay a premium for products that demonstrate a commitment to sustainable tourism practices, only a small percentage of consumers appear to seek

<sup>CST</sup> these products or understand much about what appropriate environmental, social or cultural standards *are*. “Green” tourism certification standards certainly measure and seek to mitigate the negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts of tourism businesses. Some even seek to increase the positive impacts of tourism through ensuring “fair” economic returns to the local community or environment, or even attempt to empower indigenous peoples.

Certifying tour operators and hotels facilitates mainstreaming of CSR and sustainable management practices in the tourism industry and serves not only as a relatively easy way for consumers (tourists) to identify “responsible” and “ethical” product, but communicates CSR and other important issues both B2B and to other stakeholders. Certification programs and their standards can serve to effectively communicate an in-depth review or insight through their criteria into the large range of issues that affect sustainable tourism development – and whether a tourism enterprise actually proceeds to certification or not, the programs serve to raise awareness. At the same time, certification organizations help consumers preferentially choose responsible products.

## COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE INDUSTRY REGARDING CSR TOOLS AND MEASURES

With regards to communication within the tourism industry, e-conference participants highlighted various different issues that should be addressed to support the incorporation of CSR principles and tools among tourism businesses (i.e. in particular small and micro businesses). Suggestions included:

- Obtain a clear understanding of the capacity gaps;
- Ensure that CSR tools and examples are adapted to take into account the knowledge, capacity and the culture of the countries to which CSR modules are transferred adopting “adaptive management” practices;
- Create a clear and univocal understanding of what CSR means (i.e. clarifying that integrating CSR principles and practices would mean going beyond simplistic and basic philanthropic activities);
- Maximize the participation of local communities in defining what CSR means at the local level to go beyond a simple ecolabel. Community-based organizations and NGOs at the local level are seen as very “good intermediaries” to promote a local interpretation of general CSR frameworks; and

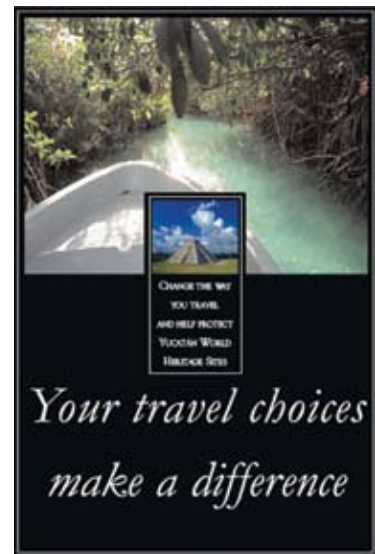
## COMMUNICATION VERSUS NON-COMMUNICATION

When it comes to providing solid motives to the mass tourism segment, as well as to small and micro business at the local level, for the integration of CSR principles and tools in their business practices, participants agreed that the real trigger would be a solid consumer demand for CSR, and that possibly the weakest link in the area of communication about CSR to consumers is how tourism companies relate their success stories to consumers. Different examples have been brought forward highlighting that there is not a unanimous view on the marketability of CSR activities.

There were a number of examples of businesses that were certified or engaged in CSR that did not promote or communicate this with their customers. The reasons for this are sometimes complex, ranging from perceptions of being “green” as equating to being of lower quality (not compatible with the image of high end “luxury” establishments), to the assumption that labels equate to more expensive product, and hence are avoided! Some companies do not communicate their environmental and social sustainability policies or CSR initiatives because they view certification mainly as a tool for improving their operations and saving money on water and energy, rather than as a tool for improving sales.

- Joint and cooperative work on CSR in tourism through networks like the Tour Operator Initiative (TOI), who are contributing to a vital exchange on CSR practices between the large tourism players.

Participants appeared to feel that the industry had not yet fully embraced CSR as there was a lack of understanding on what it was and how it might help their business. There was certainly a perception that there was a lack of common understanding about the “business case” of CSR in the tourism industry. The willingness to pay more for responsible and ethical operators by a growing number of customers is not yet evident in the mass tourism sector, despite surveys that declare a growing percentage of customers demand more responsible products and are willing to pay more for a certain “feel-good factor” (when hearing that their stay or purchase helps local community, local labor, local environment, etc.). It was felt that this “special” customer was largely confined to niche market segments, which are smaller in size, more transparent and easier to be recognized as such at the individual consumer level.



## COMMUNICATION OF CSR TO TOURISTS

With regards to communication from tourism enterprises to their consumers, two key points were expressed by the participants:

- Demand from consumers for CSR and sustainable tourism was seen as an essential communication tool to steer companies towards more responsible practices. Socially responsible purchasing and ethical purchases were concepts proposing that the mind-shift towards more sustainable products has to take place on both the producers’ and consumers’ end. The difficulty in that consumers did not necessarily preferentially choose products that demonstrated CSR needs to be addressed, but there was an agreement from some participants that these responsible or more ethical businesses tended to “do” better and were more likely to be considered quality products: businesses that take of their environment are perceived to be more likely to also take care of their customers.
- There was mention of the need to ensure end users’ participation in the formulation of the tools. This will ensure the ‘buy-in’ of target audiences from the outset.

In summary, Session 3 discussions identified the need for (1) increased communication about and for CSR in tourism, at all levels between and amongst the different stakeholders; (2) a regulatory framework to facilitate communication and common understanding of CSR; and (3) communication to various stakeholders to make a stronger case for adopting CSR in tourism.



## Session 4:

# THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN LINKING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRODUCTS TO MARKETS

This session of the e-conference centered on discussions around the following questions:

- What is the role of modern technologies, like e-business and e-marketing techniques? How can they help to improve market access to small businesses and reduce marketing costs?
- Advertising Spots, Slogans, and Reality – How do we promote sustainable tourism without telling lies?
- How can communication help increase the share of local products and services that supply the tourism industry, enhancing linkages between conventional tourism and the local economy?
- What are the experiences and lessons learned with collective marketing initiatives, grouping together smaller tour operators and service providers?
- Which communication methodologies and technologies can small businesses in developing countries use to learn about their markets?
- What are the best strategies to target travel publications and influence them to cover sustainable destinations?

### TOURISM PRODUCTS MUST BE DEMAND-DRIVEN AND RESPOND TO THE EXPERIENCES AND NEEDS OF TOURISTS

The world is littered with tourism products that failed because they did not take market demand into consideration, did not reach their markets with adequate information, or did not provide a means for their markets to reserve/purchase their products.

Today there is a wide range of marketing and promotion techniques available, supported by rapidly evolving communication technology, but the application of these



techniques and technologies is still very limited in tourism, especially in developing countries. Tourism functions through a complex supply chain that links a wide range of services from the generating markets to the final destinations. Communication is key to enhancing the information flow along this supply chain and ensuring that sustainable tourism initiatives and products eventually reach potential tourists that may be thousands of miles away.

To collect market intelligence, Richard Tuck (a tourism expert currently working in Nicaragua), suggested that micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in developing countries should be interacting (simple questionnaires or one-on-one interviews) with the tourists that are already at the locale. Questions should be directed at finding out what the tourists liked/disliked, how they arrived, how they first heard about the locale, whether or not they would recommend the locale and why/why not, where they were from, age, sex, etc. Open-ended marketing-oriented questions such as what else visitors would have liked to experience at the locale and what they would change about the locale should also be included. This will help tourist enterprises determine not only who their target market is but also *how* to communicate to them and *what* to communicate. To learn how to expand into secondary and tertiary markets MSMEs should then seek out academic institutions and NGOs that work in sustainable tourism and, more importantly, visit the tourist areas nearest to them and learn about what tourists (outside their target market) are demanding.

Simon Jones (International Institute of Tourism Studies of the George Washington University) pointed out that it may be difficult for local operators to carry out visitor surveys, and that they need to organize themselves in larger networks of similar businesses to have greater opportunities to learn from one another and gather information about their clients. Chris Seek (Solimar International) provided an example of a USAID tourism project in Romania where a local Destination Management Organization (DMO) is learning how to create visitor surveys, track website hits and page views, track information requested at information centers and, most importantly, how to analyze this information and provide it to association members as a tangible membership benefit. The project is also creating a back-end “members only” section of the destination portal that will be used to share this information. The next task will be to educate members on how to use this market research to improve/adapt their product to meet the market demand.

### Providing the Unique Experience

Metilde Wendenbaum (ECEAT) reminded participants that the most important thing that the tourists demand from “exotic” small scale suppliers is a unique experience, i.e., something they do not expect yet or demand. The strength of a small-scale supplier lies in the fact that they can make a personal connection to the guest. Methods to strengthen this personal connection are:

tion to the guest. Methods to strengthen this personal connection are:

- creating experiences that the guests will never forget;
- keeping a record of the guests in order not to forget them;
- remaining in touch with them after their visits by sending a periodic (email) card.

Word-of-mouth promotion should also not be underestimated. To effectively use this communication tool, businesses can give guests discount cards that they can pass to their friends. In this way, suppliers can also estimate the effectiveness of word of-mouth promotion.

### HELPING BUSINESSES UNDERSTAND THAT “DOING GOOD IS GOOD BUSINESS”

**Len Cordiner** reminded participants that small travel service providers will “follow the money.” They know the value of a favorable mention in Lonely Planet and they are learning about the value of favorable online ratings on the Internet. By showing them that doing ‘good’ is good business, they will follow. Len also provided an example of a restaurant in Hanoi which takes in disadvantaged youth and builds their hospitality skills to a point where the students can be placed in permanent work situations. Travelers love the place, not because the food is so special or the cost so low (it is not), but because they feel that by eating there they are doing something to support the local poor. Doing good has become good business and other SMEs see this and start to follow.

### Learning through Study Tours

Samar Hammad (craft sector in Jordan) suggested that MSMEs and Micro businesses could gain valuable advice and training by

leaving their local destination and observing how other destinations offer tourism products and services. Through the interaction with other MSMEs and tourists, business owners will be able to understand how to apply “what works in other destinations” to their own. Study tours, however, should be used with caution. Richard Tuck provided an example of NGOs that, along with government sponsorship, brought small-scale coffee producers, tour operators, and tourism providers from Nicaragua to Costa Rica over the past ten years. Some negative outcomes in this experience included:



RARE / MATTHEW HUNKE

- reinforcing a culture of “Costa Rica is better, is greener, is ...” in the minds of Nicaraguans;
- errors that Costa Rican tourism businesses make on a daily basis were transferred to the MSMEs in Nicaragua; and
- views of reality on pricing and promotion were skewed. The pricing and promotion that occurs in Costa Rica for tourists to Costa Rica cannot be the same in Nicaragua because tourism and tourists there are different.

### ADVERTISING SPOTS, SLOGANS, AND REALITY: HOW DO WE PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE TOURISM WITHOUT TELLING LIES?

Tourism marketing often uses images of pristine landscapes that promise the opportunity to experience the “Dream Vacation” with respect to the natural environment. How can a tourism marketing campaign show the unique differences of these destinations instead of making them all look the same? How do travelers learn how to see past the perfect images to understand the reality of the destination being visited?

Robin Goldberg (Lonely Planet) reminded e-conference participants that the only thing that lovely pictures and fancy slogans do is pique interest. But curious, smart, thoughtful travelers will never stop at the picture. With the proliferation of information, no traveler is going to base his/her travel decisions on a fancy ad or campaign slogan. Travelers are smart and want to make the most of their travel dollars...and for that they are willing to do some research. At best, a good ad campaign can intrigue someone enough to dig further. The key to marketing a special, unique travel

gem is to be certain that it can be found when the traveler starts to search through independent travel sources.

This reinforces the importance of reviews, referrals and word-of-mouth storytelling by those who have first-hand experience. There is nothing like a third-party endorsement which is given without any commercial interest on the part of the endorser. Great examples of this include editorials published by respected media, placement in trusted guidebooks, candid reviews by fellow travelers found in multiple web forums. Travelers are looking for honest, practical information from trusted sources, and that will drive their travel choices.

### INCREASING THE SHARE OF LOCAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES THAT SUPPLY THE TOURISM INDUSTRY, ENHANCING LINKAGES BETWEEN CONVENTIONAL TOURISM AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY

One of the reasons why tourism is such an important industry for international development is the opportunity for growth in supporting sectors. Communication plays a critical role in linking the tourism industry with supporting sectors but requires careful facilitation.

Roberta Hilbruner (USAID) provided an example of how in Northern Mozambique tourist destinations have to import their fresh vegetables and fruits because local farmers do not grow a wide variety of produce. Good facilitation between hoteliers, restaurants, farmers and extension activities can help farmers understand this market and begin to raise produce to meet the demand, increasing the local benefits from tourism.

Len Cordiner (CEO of Worldhotel-link.com) described how in Cambodia the tourism industry relies on imports for most of their agriculture products and cited quality,



CHEMUNICS INTERNATIONAL INC



quantity, delivery (reliability), and convenience (including payment terms) as reasons for sourcing elsewhere. This problem also extends to other local products including furnishings. Len recommended two things that need to be addressed to help overcome these issues:

- Building Capacity – NGOs, development agencies, and local governments must work with local suppliers to build their capacity to produce the product that is demanded by the industry; and
- Building Demand – helping the tourism industry understand that sourcing local products can help build demand for their business.

To increase demand for local products, Robin Goldberg stressed the need to help travelers understand how their dollar can make a difference and that only by asking the hard questions will travelers show businesses that these issues are important to them.

In Sierra Leone, where 90% of all food is imported due to the conflicts of the civil war, Megan Epler Wood, working with the National Hotel and Tourism Training Institute, is launching a “food enterprise” program that includes a food enterprise training course that will be made available to local farmers. Rather than trying to train the local farmers in how to produce everything the hotels need, the project is focusing on one product – fruit salad – that can be easily prepared and packaged for delivery with mini-

mum cost. The project has been very well received by local hotels and is set to expand further.

Mike Robbins (a tourism marketing expert) reminded participants about research that suggests that there is a very large proportion of the North American traveler market that would be receptive to education and awareness about making locally grown organic food choices. Whatever term one uses to describe these tourists, whether it is “geotourists,” “ecotourists” or responsible tourists, they represent a growing segment of the overall traveler market. Choosing locally grown organic food in the destinations they visit can make a huge difference both environmentally and economically. Communication with visitors in the destination to enable informed food choices is key.

### Labeling as a communication tool

Emanuele Santi (Communication Officer with the World Bank), citing an example from the World Bank Butrint (Albania)

Community-Based Tourism Project, stressed the importance of labeling local food products to help tourists understand that by purchasing such products, they are also contributing to local development and, when the label is linked to a protected area, to broader conservation goals. A good label can increase the “value” of the products.

### COLLECTIVE MARKETING INITIATIVES (GROUPING TOGETHER SMALLER TOUR OPERATORS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS)

For MSMEs in developing countries, collective marketing is a huge asset. According to Hendrik Wintjen (SNV Netherlands Development Organization – Peru), in the past years, joint marketing initiatives have been multiplying (e.g., Costa Rica) in order to face the lack of action taken by national authorities. According to him, the national tourism chambers, hotel associations and tour operator organizations formed twenty or thirty years ago didn’t react in time to the growth of long-haul tourism to developing countries. Nowadays people travel to places that were not on the tourism map a few decades ago, obliging any destination to focus on market realities in the most important source markets.

Joint marketing campaigns are defined as: 1) a new organization taking over some of the promotional and sales activities of individual suppliers; and 2) individual suppliers grouped under a common quality brand that is used next to the individual brand. Joint marketing campaigns



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may have various elements in common: a destination, type of products<sup>4</sup>, and level of quality (including sustainability). These collective marketing campaigns can generate both positive and negative reactions from the participants.

The first reaction can be distrust towards the other supplier partners involved, and in the umbrella organization. This reaction is understandable given that suppliers lose some control over ownership of the new brand and over distribution of the profits that are made by the umbrella organization.

However, experiences show that a new brand is not always perceived as a threat vis à vis replacing individual brands. On the contrary, it sometimes strengthened each individual brand/supplier, as it stimulated a competition between the suppliers who responded best to the quality criteria of the new brand. For example in Guadeloupe, six years ago, a quality brand “recommended by the National Park” has been designed for grouping all sustainable ecotourism suppliers located in and around the National Park.

Another good example is the joint marketing launched by five Costa Rican hotels under the brand “Small Distinctive Hotels” – they market the five hotels like one entity, present only products of high quality, and are continuously improving the sustainability of their products.

## UNDERSTANDING THE TOURISM PRODUCT CYCLE

**Michael Murrell** reminded participants about the importance of understanding the product life cycle of tourism. This is easy for businesses in all industries to lose sight of, even in well-developed countries, and it is often at the heart of why businesses fail to be competitive. It would be outstanding for a leading organization such as UNWTO to produce in many languages, a text that describes and illustrates the tourism product cycle, and details relevant information (examples!) concerning each part of that cycle. This is important information for everyone, from small guesthouse owners up to the level of a national tourism authority. With an understanding of the product cycle, efforts such as unifying firms and organizations around a common brand would most likely be much more successful.

## DEVELOPMENT OF A SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN TO HELP SUPPLIERS PROMOTE THEIR HIGH-RANKING PRODUCTS

In the framework of the European project TOUR LINK, the Federation of Tour Operators (FTO UK) has initiated a mandatory checklist to be used by their members when checking their suppliers on sustainability. The high-ranking products are promoted to all member tour operators. The FTO recommend that its members take up more high-ranking hotels in their offer. This is done in the framework of the so-called “sustainable supply chain management.” The TOUR LINK project develops this concept of chain management in collaboration with partners in other countries such as the ANVR (Dutch tour operators’ association) and the Belgium tour operator’s association. The FTO represents 80% of the market in the UK and the ANVR more than 90% of the Dutch market!

Chris Seek sums up some possible reasons for a program’s failure:

- The program is not owned/managed by local stakeholders with an intimate knowledge of the products. Too often – especially in developing countries – joint marketing programs are created by outsiders or “someone with a website” in order to make money in the short term.
- The program is run by an individual or small group of local stakeholders who are working only to further their own interests and leadership position.
- The individuals doing the marketing are not from the culture of the target market.
- The program collects annual membership dues rather than working on a commission basis, but fails to provide a return on this investment.

Demonstrating tangible program benefits to the members is key to any collective marketing program. Benefits include the following<sup>5</sup>:

- Suppliers spend less money in marketing because they share the total cost of the marketing action.

4 For instance: PROA, an association of bed and breakfasts in Praia do Rosa, Santa Catarina, Brazil: <http://www.praiadorosa-brasil.com.br/>, or Cooprena, an association of Community-Based tourism and agro-ecotourism suppliers. [www.turismoruralcr.com/](http://www.turismoruralcr.com/)

5 Following that approach, when organizing specific marketing actions, the Green Travel Market ([www.greentravelmarket.info](http://www.greentravelmarket.info)), marketing service promoting sustainable tourism products to tour operators, tries to offer to outbound tour operators a complete range of products located in one specific area and committed to certain criteria.

## THE DESTINATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS MODEL

Destination Management Systems (DMS) consist of an IT infrastructure used by a destination organization for the collection, storage, manipulation and distribution of information in all its forms, and for the transaction of reservations and other commercial activities.

The following are key to successful DMS projects:

- A public/private partnership
- Buy-in from all stakeholders
- The web site must be high quality, easily found on the internet, and able to build trust
- Suppliers must be connected to the internet
- The site must have the capability to process reservations and financial transactions.

Destination Management Companies (DMC) are local service organizations that provide creative itineraries and logistics management based on an in-depth knowledge of the destination. The DMC model is based on a sustainable business plan that overcomes information gaps in developing destinations.

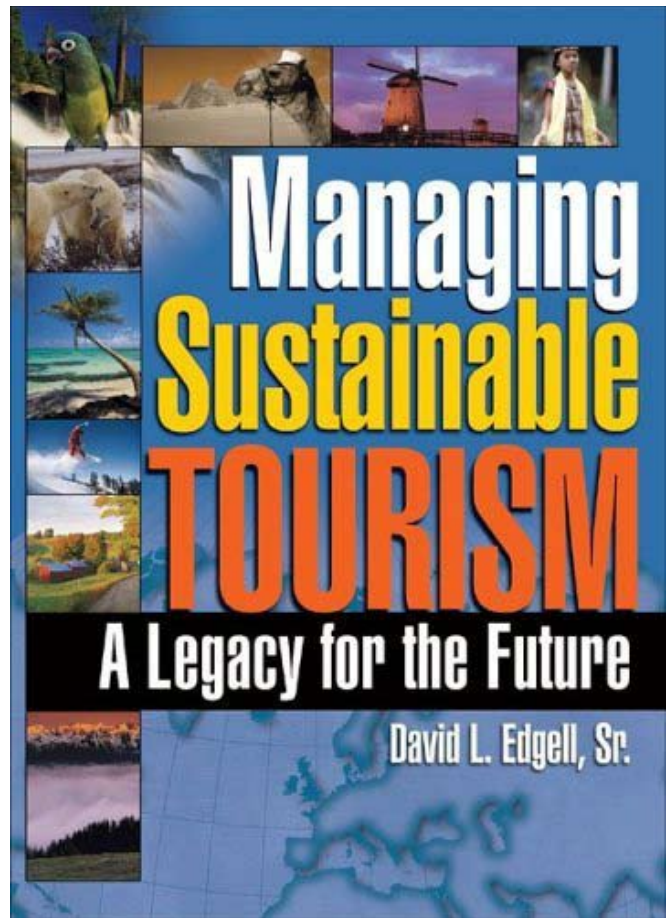
- They can share in the promotion's innovative ideas and knowledge about their products.
- They can be more visible as a group in the e-commerce world.
- They will attract the attention of a larger public.
- They will prevent overloading tour operators and other distribution channels with a plethora of promotional messages about products located in the same region.

## THE ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PROMOTION

### Role of tourism boards

It appears that tourism boards are at present very ill-equipped to deal with sustainable tourism in their Internet promotion activities. For example, national tourism portals should do a better job of updating directories for traveler services. The Catalan Tourism Board could be a model. They provide regular updates about sustainable products on their website and post emails about sustainable tourism matters through strategic distribution lists.

One e-conference participant remarked that an absolute condition for better performance of tourism boards was better education of staff regarding issues of sustainability. Sustainability has penetrated curricula in universities and higher professional education, but not at lower educational levels.



### Role of internet in enhancing reputation and building brand

Many examples of “self purifying” marketing or promotion were shown, especially for community-based tourism. Travelers might not see all the behind-the-scenes activities of a business, so it is important to share practices with them. However, dishonest, or cli-

**Ron Mader** ([www.planeta.com](http://www.planeta.com)) launched the idea that National Tourism Boards could establish awards for the best websites that illustrate a country's sustainable tourism practices. National tourism portals could be rated not only by what they have online, but also by how they participate in independent groups (e.g., ECOCLUB, green-travel, and Planeta) and whether or not they link to independent sites, including blogs (internet logbooks) and flicker galleries (online pictures presentation). Bonus points could be awarded for showing visitors where they can stay, eat and drink.

ché marketing messages very quickly backfire as they are identified by knowledgeable travelers who have an amazing ability to judge real commitment versus green-washing. WHL (World Hotel Link), has grouped self-declared “sustainable products” under a “Caring for the Destination” banner. *“It’s really about connecting the best of local with the best of global that will win the day”*<sup>6</sup>. Tom Hall (Lonely Planet) added that *“Reputation within market can be as strong a force as individual or collective certification. Sustainable products can rely on Internet marketing with certificates on such reputation.”*

Metilde Wendenbaum (ECEAT Projects) stated that sustainability logos or “banners” can be a very distinctive method to add quality in Internet marketing. But for large operators like big-scale hotels, self-declaration for sustainability still needs to be accompanied by a third party certification. While small-scale suppliers can communicate much more effectively about sustainability, and achieve trust among their clients, they do not often use this to advantage yet. ECEAT Projects uses the Internet for online data storage ([www.greentravelmarket.info](http://www.greentravelmarket.info)) of sustainable products and tour operators that can be used by partners all over the world as basis for their marketing activities. It can also be accessed by outbound tour operators who are looking for new products. The products are “certified” (hotels) or “recommended” (community-based tourism, small-scale tourism) by internationally trusted environmental or development organizations.

Ron Mader also mentioned that certification should be much more holistic in its approach and, if we are to judge individual operators and hotels, we should also review tourism officials, academics, NGOs and international institutions including World Bank, UNEP and UNWTO.

Valere Tjolle (Totem Tourism) suggested that marketing in general has been revolutionized by the Internet. Instead of suppliers selling through agencies, businesses can offer their services directly to an international market. Without large monetary investments, small businesses can perhaps profit from the Internet through “buzzing campaigns” in which email messages “buzz” around on their own to specific Internet communities with the invitation to add news. After a certain period, contents are published to all recipients. There are not yet many examples of buzzing

campaigns in sustainable tourism. Valere invites experimentation with this. His “Totem news”, an email distribution to thousands of sustainable tourism stakeholders, is such an Internet tool but is directed to policymakers.

Participants asked the question, “Can we expect small-scale sustainable companies to be so creative?” Large companies such as *Nike* are able to pay numerous young “field researchers” to identify the newest and hottest trends, but this seems out of reach for small scale tourism enterprises. Alternatively, do we want a kind of “tourism Nike” with an explicit statement of corporate social responsibility? A warning against the self-purifying principle of Internet marketing must be raised concerning large scale “sustainable” products. Relative to small-scale community-based tourism products, large hotels need to invest much more to reach a certain level of sustainability. At the same time however, they have the ability to present their first, small investments as something trustworthy or “sustainable” (like the Hilton “We Care” program). Do Internet communities represent strong enough consumer knowledge to prevent green-washing?

Finally Zachary Rozga and René Schärer (<http://www.fortalnet.com.br/~fishnet/>) caution against over-emphasizing the current potential of the Internet as a direct marketing tool for community-based tourism because of the large “digital gap” that still exists between the “developed” and “developing” worlds.

## STRATEGIES TO TARGET TRAVEL PUBLICATIONS AND INFLUENCE THEM TO COVER SUSTAINABLE DESTINATIONS

The travel media is one of the most important vehicles in tourism marketing, providing unbiased reviews and authors’ first-hand experiences of a destination. Often driven by experienced public relations firms and large budgets, most of the travel media is focused on the traditional tourism industry. The following are participants’ tips for unknown sustainable tourism destinations or businesses in how to capture the interest of travel publishers.

**1. Promote the destination, not a specific business or development project.** Editors care only about what readers

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6 According to Bill Hinchberger, the Travel Website Owners network (TWO) (<http://www.travelwebowners.org>) is also such a bottom up approach to Internet marketing.

want to read. As interesting as your project or business may be, editors want to know about the destination.

Why would a reader want to visit? What is the appeal?

**2. Focus on the experience** – Read through any travel publication and you will notice that the author is not talking about the facts of the trip – they are focusing on the visitor experience. What makes the destination unique? Help the editor imagine the view at sunset or taste the traditional meal with a local family.

**3. Use a light hand with the “sustainability” language.** Even though we all know how important this is - don't ignore the first two points and forget that editors want to know about the destination and the experience first. If a tour company is helping local communities wonderful! It's ok to include this, but don't write the entire press release about it. Stay focused on the experience and the destination.

**4. They can't write about it if they don't know about it.** Don't be afraid to send editors information and story ideas. Ideally, these should be reviewed by a writer with at least some experience in drafting press releases, but if you don't send the information how are they going to know about it?

**5. Target specialty publications.** Everyone thinks of the big travel publications when trying to target the media – but there are hundreds of other publications that are always searching for story ideas. In a project in Panama focusing on the Camino de Cruces trail along the Panama Canal, someone on the project team wrote a full article about the use of mules by the Spaniards to haul gold along the trail and how visitors can walk the trail and find mule footings. They submitted the article to a mule magazine and it was published in its entirety.

**6. Press trips work.** While some of the larger publica-

tions do not take free or reduced cost press trips, many other writers would jump at the opportunity to cover a story and experience the destination. But don't invite a group of journalists from different interests on one group tour. They each want to see different things and more than likely no one will get to see what he or she specifically wants to cover.

Tom Hall from Lonely Planet's London office remarked that ethical living is a major obsession in the UK, with travel being one of the standard-bearers for the movement. Newspapers like the Guardian and the Times have weekly travel supplements, which have either regular columns on this subject or seemingly weekly special issues. Whether it's camping or ecolodges, it seems the British public can't get enough of this subject. Newspapers want one thing – to sell more papers. So, to make this work, there needs to be demand from readers. Remembering what the public wants to read is a key to success. The audience should be considered at all times.

Robin Goldberg pointed out that any publication (whether newspaper, magazine or guidebook) is looking to point the traveler to great travel experiences. If a business (ideally, a sustainable business...but truly any business) wants to get coverage, the key is to offer something spectacular, let the media know about it, and then deliver above and beyond expectations.

Metilde Wendenbaum suggested that when publishing a guide for small-scale suppliers, it might be worthwhile to link up with mainstream publishing houses. Metilde provided an example from the European Centre for Eco Agro Tourism, which published the “Green Holiday Guide Europe” together with the Dutch Touring Club ANWB.



## Session 5

# ORIENTING VISITORS AND INTERPRETING TOURISM DESTINATIONS

### ORIENTATION

Orienting visitors to a destination is important both before they arrive and after they have arrived on-site. Orientation includes practicalities such as directional, local transportation, safety, event, and business information (for example, restaurant location, hours, menu, and price range). Orientation can also include basic background information that visitors should be aware of – local customs, responsible environmental behavior, basic history and geography, and best ways to learn more about the place. As one participant stated, “Travelers expect to find helpful directions. Private and public operations understand that repeat visitation depends on making a good first impression! Effective signage demonstrates a commitment to improved communication among locals and travelers. Signage (signs, posters, bulletin boards, highway markers, and restaurant menus, brochure racks) educates and minimizes confusion. Whether maintaining national parks or establishing information kiosks or visitor centers, the best facilities are proactive, keeping travel information up-to-date and acquiring materials from local businesses.”

### INTERPRETATION

Every potential tourism destination has its own story and character. Capturing, interpreting, and presenting that story are the essence of sustainable “place-based” tourism. It is this flavor that defines a location. From product branding to visitor opportunities, resources and services, this is the “gel” that binds the experience together. As such, its elements and many manifestations have real economic value. This same interpretive effort can also serve local communities as an educational tool, reinforcing heritage and social norms. Interpretation is therefore not



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solely a tool to “brand” a specific destination. It is also an activity that creates the image that a specific territory and community will disseminate among visitors and that will contribute to community education, pride and sense of place. The importance of involving local communities in building their image and in sharing their culture with visitors was stressed by many participants in the e-conference.

The importance of presenting or communicating local cultures to visitors is a vital aspect of their experience. Cultural exchanges between different people can signify an enriching experience for visitors who come to better understand the history, culture, life ways, and natural and cultural heritage of sites, regions, or countries new to them. Unless the visitors are extremely well informed, they may not be aware of all the opportunities available for cultural interaction or of all the interesting aspects of the local culture. Visitors may also not be aware of cultural norms.

It is important that local people or local community leaders ensure that adequate efforts are made to inform as many visitors as possible about local customs and cultural values. Sharing knowledge of local heritage and customs enriches visitors' experience, and encourages "right behavior." The "authenticity" of this information – created by the community for community benefit – is not lost on visitors and deepens their experience.

Heritage Design/USDA Forest Service provided the following interesting examples.

- On the Micronesian island of Kosrae, a sign kiosk in each village includes community interpretation of its own chiefdom or municipality, including clan heritage, customs and festivals. This sign is placed alongside a map-based island orientation and visitor opportunities panel, with another interpreting island ecology and history.
- In Jamaica's Cockpit Country, bus kiosks in mountain villages contain signs being developed by those communities, showcasing who they are and their heritage. Accompanying signage addresses Cockpit Country biological diversity and why it is important to protect it.
- Villages along the Iditarod Trail in Alaska are preparing community heritage media based on interviews with elders by schoolchildren. In addition to preserving local heritage, this will also be used for branding efforts and visitor materials for each community along the historic transportation route.

The role of local tour operators was emphasized. James Dion stated that many private sector tour companies do an excellent job in providing interpretation and in creating a positive visitor experience for their clients. On-site interpretation at cultural, heritage and natural sites is of-

ten poor or non-existent. This is often because the agency or organization responsible for the stewardship of the site does not consider providing interpretation services to visitors to be a primary responsibility. Site managers, in fact, too often view their primary role as being custodians rather than service providers. Interpretation therefore becomes the preserve of inbound and outbound tour operators. For example, a free and independent traveler in Peru visiting Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca, will find virtually nothing on site interpretation at either of these places. However, taking a tour with some locally owned agencies based out of Cuzco will enhance visits through excellent interpretation and service received. This, at the same time, means supporting a locally owned business and helping to employ local people. This is a win-win situation for everyone. As Sheryl Fernando stated, a good tourist guide is extremely important in letting visitors "feel and experience the place they are visiting."

**Interpretation** "aims to create in visitors meaning, so that they can put a place into personal perspective and identify with it in a way that is more profound and enduring than random fact-learning can alone produce. Interpretation is meaning-making" (Sam Ham, Meaning Making – The Premise and Promise of Interpretation)

**Interpretation** is "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, or by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information" (Tilden, Interpreting Our Heritage)

## A FINAL SUMMING UP...

The e-forum and speaker series clearly established that communication plays an important role in sustainable tourism development. Participants from around the globe provided numerous examples and case studies, sharing experiences and lessons learned from utilizing communication methodologies to address the challenges of policy development, community involvement, corporate social responsibility, linkages to markets, and visitor orientation and interpretation in tourism development that respects and protects natural and cultural heritage.

Discussions emphasized the multiple approaches that communication can bring to successful and sustainable tourism development. It can:

- involve stakeholders (including local communities) in decision-making;
- facilitate networking and sharing of information and knowledge;
- catalyze collaborative action;
- encourage private sector investments;
- advocate for necessary policy change;
- build skills and capacity;
- control expectations;
- support adoption of standards;
- develop demand for sustainable products;
- link tourism products to markets;
- explain cultural norms to visitors;
- enhance visitor experiences; and
- scale-up impacts.

Too often activities initiated at the local level have failed because consensus has not been developed with regards to policy goals or product and project methodology. The inclusion of carefully thought out marketing strategies has often made the difference between success and failure, and between top and minor destinations. The need for thoughtfully designed and carefully implemented com-



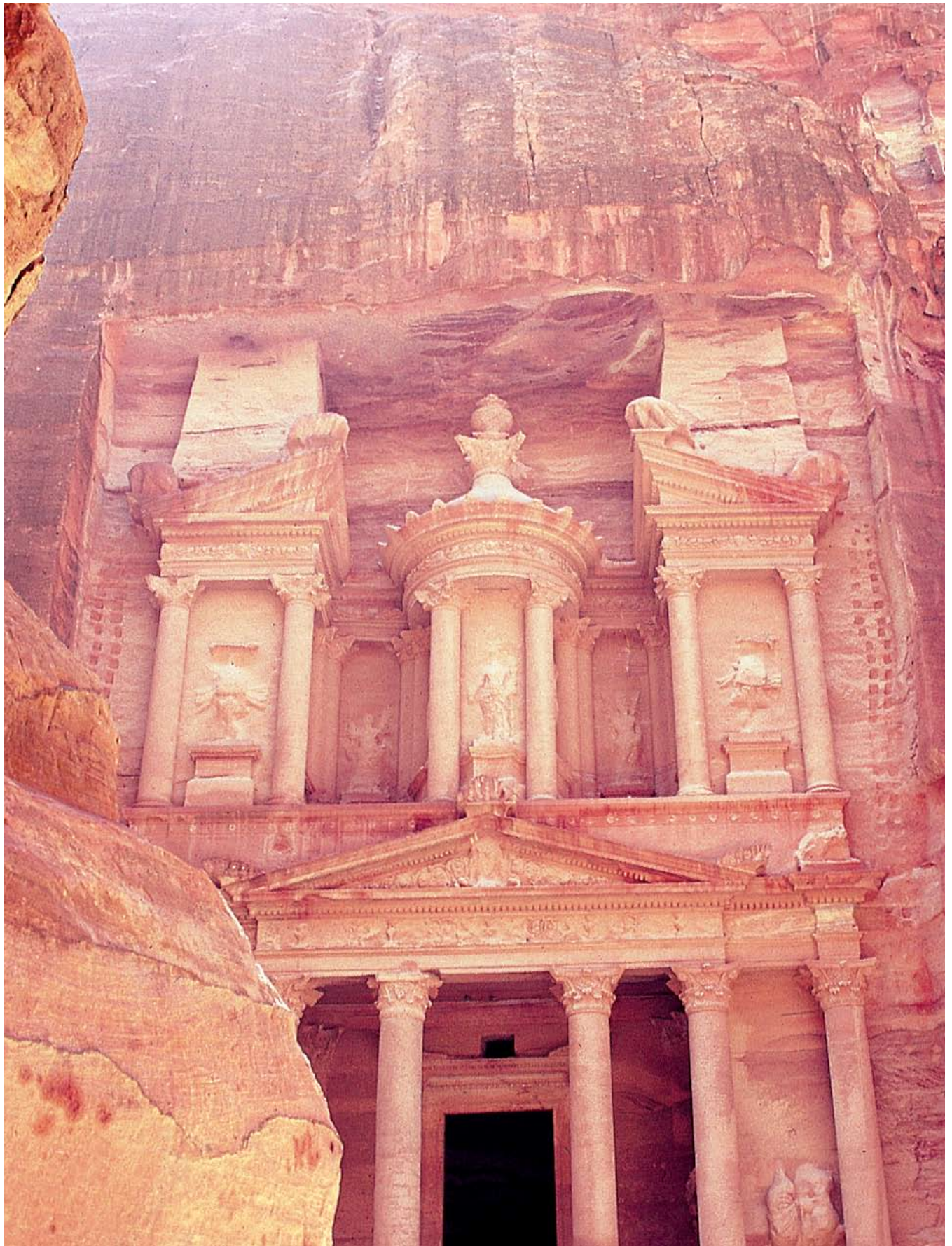
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munication activities has also been stressed in managing expectations and fostering positive relations between state authorities and local communities.

Moderators, presenters and participants in the e-conference and subsequent seminar series agreed that a well-designed communication strategy is essential to the success overall of tourism development programs and activities at both local and national levels, and should be incorporated into projects from the outset. The strategy should identify how information sharing, awareness-building, advocacy, networking, and conflict mitigation will be woven throughout all tourism development activities, and should fully integrate the art and science of communication with the other project technical skills needed for planning, implementing and evaluating project activities in the sustainable tourism sector.

We hope that this work will serve as both inspiration and guide for communicators and sustainable tourism development practitioners, and can provide a jumping-off point to stimulate further discussions and collaboration between the two disciplines.







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